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DEPARTURES



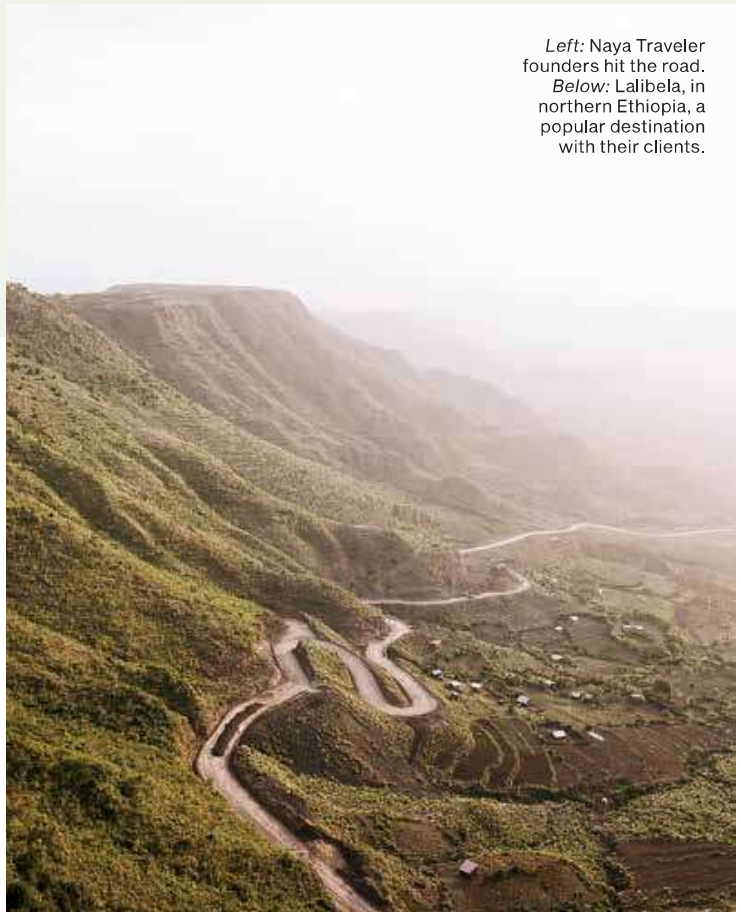
The Fashion Issue

The Road Not Taken

A trio of young luxury travel experts want to shake up the industry—and your soul. *by Lauren Mechling*



Left: Naya Traveler founders hit the road.
Below: Lalibela, in northern Ethiopia, a popular destination with their clients.



“**WE DON’T DO** bucket lists,” Sarah Casewit tells me, grinning slyly. “Anyone can privatize a UNESCO site for a client if they know what strings to pull. But that’s just scratching the surface.”

Speaking from her office in Buenos Aires, the twentysomething is talking about Naya Traveler, the firm that Casewit and two friends started two years ago. Named after the Sanskrit word for “purpose” or “wisdom,” Naya is pushing the boundaries of luxury travel. This could include hanging out with a Dorze tribal chief in Ethiopia’s Omo Valley or a trek with a shaman through highland Peru. At a time when anybody with means can charter a jet to Punta del Este or heli-surf halfway around the world, Naya offers travelers what might be the greatest luxury of all: the path to personal transformation.

“We want to bring travel back to what it used to be,” says Marta Tucci, one of the cofounders. “A lot of people travel to escape. Our client wants to find something.”

With their radiant looks and global pedigrees, the outfitters might as well be the three muses of conscientious exploration. Barcelona-bred Tucci, with a background in humanitarian work and documentary photography, believes in the power of encounters with locals to

enhance a visitor’s understanding of a place and its heritage. Sofia Mascotena, the one member of the team over 30, grew up in Argentina and concerns herself with bringing travelers behind the scenes so they can experience cultures firsthand. Casewit, who grew up in Morocco and studied comparative religion at George Washington University, is responsible for setting up spiritual rituals and casual teas with theology and history scholars.

Slow down, see more. It’s an approach that seems to be working. When Gabriela Alexander’s son turned 25, the Los

Angeles financier contacted Naya. “I wanted something he’d never forget,” the 54-year-old says. Over Christmas the pair traveled to Morocco, where she recalls going to luxurious *riads* and hidden gardens while skipping the famous bathhouses in favor of hammams patronized by locals. “My senses were overwhelmed,” she says. Three months later, unable to shake a feeling that something was amiss, Alexander convinced her husband to split their time between L.A. and Mexico City, where the rhythm is calmer, she says. “I felt like there was more to life than my bubble. I want to be present.”